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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 009665

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2031 TAGS: PHUM PGOV KISL CH

SUBJECT: QINGHAI MUSLIMS BUYING CLOUT, BUILDING MOSQUES AS

COMMUNITY FISSURES DEEPEN

REF: A. BEIJING 8788

¶B. 04 BEIJING 20186

1C. STATE 74399

Classified By: Classified by Acting Political Internal Unit Chief Susan Thornton. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Tensions between Muslim communities in ethnically diverse Qinghai Province, particularly in relations between the traditional Qadim group and the Saudi Arabian-influenced Ikhwan and Salafiyya movements (see ref A), were apparent during a mid-May visit by poloff to the cities of Xining and Golmud. An imam at Xining's Salafiyya-affiliated mosque criticized the Qadim for "deviating" from the words of the Koran. In Golmud, Qinghai's second largest city, rival groups are each building new multi-million RMB mosques, funded by local wealthy Muslims. With increasing access to the Internet and satellite television, local Muslims' views toward the United States are being shaped largely by depictions in the Chinese and Muslim countries' media of U.S. attitudes toward the Muslim world. While some Qinghai Muslims criticized U.S. military actions in Iraq and even defended Osama bin-Laden, one imam expressed appreciation for President Bush's strong support for religious freedom. End Summary.

Tensions Increasing Among Muslims in Xining

12. (C) Deepening divisions within China's Muslim community are evident in Qinghai's capital, Xining, whose 330,000 Muslims, predominately ethnic Hui, constitute approximately one third of the city's population. Twenty-eight of Xining's 30 mosques are affiliated with the Ikhwan movement, which was spread to China from Saudi Arabia in the 19th century by the grandfather of the current head imam at the Dongguan Mosque, the city's largest and oldest, according to Dongguan worshippers. The movement's forefather was influenced by "reformist" Wahhabi ideals, which contrast with the practices of the Qadim, also referred to as the "old tradition." The Qadim maintains a long history in China and has absorbed aspects of Chinese culture into religious life.

- (C) Adherents of the Qadim order, which only operates one mosque in Xining (called Yangjiaxiang), rarely interact with the Ikhwan, community leader Ma Zhanhu remarked to poloff. While in the past, the two orders co-existed in relative harmony, disagreements over religious rituals have soured relations in recent years. The Ikhwan maintains that only the imam can recite the Koran, while the Qadim permits all worshippers to read aloud, Ma noted. The Ikhwan insists on strictly following the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, while the Qadim also adheres to the precepts taught by Mohammed's disciples. Ma stated that although the tensions are not as high as in Gansu's Linxia Prefecture (Ref B), the Qadim and Ikhwan keep their distance. Ikhwan Muslims dining at a restaurant very close to the Yangjiaxiang Mosque said they never pray at Yangjiaxiang and have very limited contact with the Qadim.
- 14. (C) Several Xining Muslim residents identified the Shulinxiang Mosque as the city's single Salafiyya mosque, also labeled by some as Wahhabi given the movements' close links. The mosque is a plain, rectangular-shaped, modern structure, lacking the elaborate Chinese-style design that marks many older mosques. Elder Muslims sitting in front of the mosque described Salafiyya religious practices as very similar to the Saudi Arabian observance of Islam. In contrast to other mosques poloffs have visited, Shulinxiang worshippers donned kafiyas prior to beginning prayer.
- \P_5 . (C) The young imam, also surnamed Ma, a native of Ningxia, was writing on his laptop computer when

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poloff entered his well-furnished office. He explained that the Salafiyya broke off from the Ikhwan because the latter placed too much emphasis on the role of the imam. The Salafiyya believe the imam should only play a guiding role and not possess religious authority, such as the right to issue religious edicts. Asked for his views on the Qadim, Ma remarked that he respects all Islamic groups as long as they follow the words of the Koran. The Qadim have deviated from the Koran's teachings, he argued, adding that the Qadim themselves are unsure to which school of Islam they belong. A separate movement growing rapidly across China, the Sala, has "led people astray," another man sitting in the room remarked, echoing comments by Beijing-based Islam experts (Ref A).

Competitive Mosque Building in Golmud

- $\underline{\mbox{1}} \mbox{6.}$ (C) Divisions within the Muslim community of Golmud, the starting point of the soon to be completed Qinghai-Tibet railway located 800 km west of Xining, mirrored those in Xining, albeit on a smaller scale. Approximately one-quarter to one-third of Golmud's 270,000 residents are Muslim, according to local residents. Both the city's Ikhwan-affiliated Hexi Mosque and Qadim-dominated Hedong Mosque, separated by less than two kilometers, are in the process of constructing elaborate new multi-million RMB mosques adjacent to the current, decades-old structures. Worshippers at both mosques played down any overt conflicts between the two communities but indicated they have limited interaction. The contrast in dress, with the Hexi Islamic students garbed in long grey suits and the Hedong students in western clothing and baseball caps, highlighted differences in the influence and acceptance of Chinese culture.
- 17. (C) Mosque worshippers said they receive no

assistance from the Chinese Government or other Muslim countries and that the construction of the new mosques is being funded by the local Muslim community. The soon to be completed Hedong Mosque project will cost 10 million RMB (USD 1.25 million). While Golmud is a remote and relatively poor city, a number of Golmud Muslims have earned fortunes by exploiting the surrounding area's rich natural resources, especially jade and gold. A sign outside the Hedong Mosque listed the amounts pledged by a small group of donors for the project, as well as for general mosque maintenance. Golmud's Muslim community is quite powerful, a local Han resident grudgingly remarked, noting that Muslims maintain a virtual monopoly over the profitable passenger transportation route to Lhasa.

(C) Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, 230 km south of Xining is home to over 80,000 Salar Muslims (distinct from the Sala religious sect), who maintain their own spoken language. A 9.5 million RMB (USD 1.19 million) mosque is being constructed directly across from Xunhua's historic Jiezi Mosque, where the oldest Koran in China has been stored since the Salar community requested its return from the Qinghai Provincial Museum several years ago. The new mosque, whose twin minarets reach to ten stories, is expected to be completed in August, a community leader explained, adding that they still need to raise 2 million RMB. Funding for the project comes mostly from locals, who have become wealthy through trade, agriculture and natural resource development. Precious minerals were discovered in the area in the 1980s following the construction of dam in the Yellow River, which runs through Xunhua, a guide explained.

Mosque-affiliated Islamic Teaching Flourishes

¶9. (C) The majority of mosques poloff visited in Qinghai house Islamic schools, with the number of students ranging from a handful to almost a hundred at the Dongguan Mosque. Students, ranging in age from 18 to 30, do not pay tuition but are supported by the

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local community. Imams acknowledged the official regulation that restricts religious education for minors less than 18 years old. They said, however that this regulation does not extend to prayer at the mosques, adding that youngsters sometimes attend prayer. Most students at the mosque-affiliated schools are taught Arabic, and a Yangjiaxiang Mosque teacher said they also study Persian. The Dongguan Mosque boasts rigorous standards for its acceptance of students and requires them to pass an exam. A 23-year old Hui student from Xinjiang explained that he chose to study at Dongguan because similar mosque-sponsored schools are prohibited in Xinjiang. Xinjiang imams are only permitted to accept one student, an imam receiving advanced training at Dongguan stated. They cannot teach the Koran and can only provide instruction in the call to prayer, he said.

Views of the Muslim World and the United States

110. (C) Despite assertions of no significant financial linkages, Qinghai Muslims were very interested in the affairs of outside Muslims. A young imam at the Dongguan Mosque surnamed Cheng who also uses his Arabic name, Nordin, remarked that he and his peers watch many Muslim countries' television stations that are transmitted via satellite and read the online Arabic news, while occasionally listening to Voice of America and Radio Free Asia broadcasts. A few Xunhua

County residents commented that they enjoy Muslim countries' television programs, also transmitted through satellite. An elderly man at Xining's Lulinxiang Mosque, who was scanning the Chinese newspaper posted in the mosque courtyard bulletin board, stated that his main objective in reading the news is to learn about the issues affecting the Muslim world. "America is bad," he subsequently remarked, after learning of poloff's nationality.

(C) Local Muslims' views of the United States are shaped largely by depictions in the Chinese and Muslim countries' media of the U.S. attitudes toward the Muslim world. A long-bearded young imam training at the Dongguan Mosque recalled local Muslims' indignation over reports that U.S. military personnel at Guantanamo Bay used the Koran as "toilet paper." Yangjiaxiang Mosque community leader, who said that his information source is primarily the Chinese media, called Osama Bin-Laden "a hero" for his "defense of Muslims" and suggested that this view is common among his peers. While voicing concern over U.S. involvement in Muslim countries, an imam at Golmud's Hexi Mosque nonetheless expressed a strong interest in President Hu Jintao's recent trip to the United States and his discussions with President Bush. The imam appreciated President Bush's statements in support of religious freedom, a message of great significance to the Chinese Muslim community, he said. This community leader also indicated his disdain for the governmentsponsored imam training program (ref A), noting that he will send a mosque "administrator," not an imam, to attend.

Comment

112. (C) In contrast with many poor Muslim communities in China, Qinghai's Muslims appear to have amassed considerable wealth and control over local industries. Their wealth funds mosque building and buys Muslims local political clout, incurring the resentment of local Han and other non-Muslim residents. Both the deepening fissures within the Chinese Muslim community and its increasing clout and exposure to the affairs of Muslims outside China pose challenges that the Chinese Government is ill-equipped to handle.